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ARTIST'S STATEMENT.....	1
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AIMS FOR THE POST GRADUATE YEAR.....	2
--------------------------------------	---

RATIONALE AND INFLUENCES.....	3
-------------------------------	---

Subjective Experience.....	3
----------------------------	---

The Landscape.....	7
--------------------	---

Early Renaissance	
-------------------	--

Religious Art.....	8
--------------------	---

NOTES ON PROCESS.....	12
-----------------------	----

CONCLUSION.....	14
-----------------	----

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	15
-------------------	----

THUMB SKETCHES.....	17
---------------------	----

ILLUSTRATIONS	
---------------	--

Durer:The Knight, Death and the Devil.....	18
---	----

Grunewald:Christ on the Cross.....	19
---------------------------------------	----

Grunewald: St Anthony Abbot assailed by monstrous demons.....	20
--	----

Bosch: Musical Hell.....	21
--------------------------	----

Rubens: Decius Mus Relating His Dream.....	22
---	----

COLOURED PRINTS OF PAINTINGS.....	23 - 32
-----------------------------------	---------

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

The concern of my painting this year has been to seek means of exploring and representing the internal world of human experience. Basic divisions exist. Water, land, and sky; foreground, middle ground and distance. Within these stable relationships, ritualistic dramas emerge. Shapes appear from darkness, landscape from marks on the canvas. The shapes become abstracted figures, rocks, animals and birds. Smoke becomes an entity in its own right. Forms without individual features stretch, stride and collapse across the landscape.

This world does not exist outside the imagination. It exists in its own terms while making references to humanity, religion and society.

We have become the traveller in this landscape. Everywhere we meet relics of previous encounters, flashes of current dialogue, moments of something frozen. At first we are strangers in this land; the invitation is to enter and explore.

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I do not wish my painting to be tied down to any one explanation of its purpose and meaning. I enjoy and welcome the possibility of numerous interpretations. However I accept the value of an explanation in augmenting the painting and making it more accessible not only to the viewer but to myself.

Finally, by choosing the "inner vision" as my theme for the year I am also attempting to consolidate all my painting to date.

AIMS FOR THE POST GRADUATE YEAR

The concern of my painting this year has been to seek means of exploring and representing the internal world of human experience. My intention has been to provide for the viewer, by representing the world of my own imagination, a link to aspects of his or her own subjective experience, and through that to touch on themes which are common to all people.

To do this, I have drawn on three primary sources; my own inner world; the use of landscape as a metaphor for an "inner journey"; and the European tradition of religious art as exemplified by three Renaissance painters outside Italy; Bosch, Grunewald and Durer.

A further aim was to articulate more deliberately the concepts behind my work. Previously I have painted in an unconscious manner, virtually ignoring content for the sheer involvement with making a picture, the processes of pigment, colour and "mark making".

Over the year this endeavour to understand and articulate meaning has become a parallel process to the painting itself; on one hand a process of simply reflecting on the finished paintings, on the other hand a deliberate informing factor in the conception of each new painting.

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Finally, by choosing the "inner vision" as my theme for the year I am also attempting to consolidate all my painting to date,

with its emphasis on the imagination, abstract landscape, the process of mark making and concern with the unconscious.

RATIONALE AND INFLUENCES

The three sources of my painting this year have been from different aspects of my life which have come together in this body of work. Each source reflects and conflates with the others. Each requires some explanation.

Subjective Experience

European culture has a tradition of contrasting and often creating opposition between "objective" and "subjective" aspects of human existence. Objective is considered as external to us, and universal and thus able to be studied with scientific methodology. Subjectivity is perceived as personal, individual and not amenable to "objective" scrutiny.

My own belief is that subjectivity, being experienced by every individual is thus universal and in this sense objective. My painting is concerned with these "universal" aspects of subjective experience; in Jungian terms, archetypal aspects.

The three levels of universal, cultural and individual have been identified in anthropology:

"Every person is in certain respects

- a. like all other people
- b. like some other people
- c. like no other person."

(Kluckhohn and Murray, quoted in David Barash Sociobiology: The Whisperings Within, 1979.)

My interest lies in providing links between these three levels and to reach the universal by beginning with my individual subjective experience.

The rationale for beginning with myself is simply that, by definition, the only person we experience from the inside is ourself. We infer that each other person has an inside-looking-out experience which is at once unique to them and common to all people.

I have always been introspective; my interest has lain in understanding myself in relation to the world, and man's place in the world. I began painting as a means of expressing externally what I experience internally. My art is drawn directly from this inner vision rather than in depictions of the external world.

There exist risks in taking such a predominantly subjective approach in art. In particular Berger and other Marxist critics express the concern that inward looking art is basically indulgent and futile. Instead art must examine and illuminate social and political realities, thus operating as a social force on the middle, cultural rung of our three levels.

Berger, in Permanent Red, 1960:

"The division now is between those artists who have a sense of responsibility and those who have not, or to put it another way, between those artists whose view of life can sustain a minimum faith in the value of human exchange, and those whom alienation has made pathological." (p46)

Christopher Lasch in The Culture of Narcissism (1978) puts this more forcefully, stating that the inner search leads only to "the dead end of narcissistic preoccupation with self."

Suzi Gablik (Has Modernism Failed?, 1984) devotes a whole chapter to this debate. On the one hand "Marxist aesthetics demands that

art illuminate social relationships and help us to recognise and change social reality" (p25), while on the other hand Malevich championing early Modernism declared:

"Art no longer cares to serve the state and religion. It no longer wishes to illustrate the history of manners; it wants nothing to do with the object as such, and believes it can exist in and for itself, without things." (Gablik, p21.)

I believe a risk of futility does exist when self preoccupation becomes exclusive; that is, unconnected to and uninformed by the two other levels of cultural context and universal human experience. However, to me, self exploration is far from a narcissistic dead end if treated as a rigorous exploration of an existing reality.

The Renaissance painters, for example, saw their art as a "window" onto the external world, and thus "objective" through their detailed and thorough observation of anatomy and perspective.

However, as Gombrich describes with regard to Bosch (The Story of Art, 1978 edition) these same "objective" techniques can be used to observe and describe man's inner world:

"Like Grunewald, Bosch showed that the traditions and achievements of painting which had been developed to represent reality most convincingly could be turned around, as it were, to give us an equally plausible picture of things no human eye had seen. He became famous for his terrifying representations of the power of evil...For the first and perhaps the only time, an artist had succeeded in giving concrete and tangible shape to the fears that had haunted the minds of man in the Middle Ages." (p276)

In practice there is always an interplay between subjective and objective, which can be seen as two aspects of a complete whole. Even photorealism speaks as much about the artist's response to the world as it does about the world itself. Thus the Renaissance

"window" was in fact two way: Michelangelo, Raphael, Leonardo and Botticelli were all unique in their individual vision and expression, just as they were also an integral part of their cultural context.

(the cross) and the unconscious (water, the veil image.)

I will describe the use of expressive and formal concerns in the "Notes on Process" later.

In my work this year I have utilised three major means for expressing the inner world through art; the use of symbols and allegory, an expressive, emotive painterliness and deliberate use of formal devices; tonal contrasts, back lighting and so on.

Symbolism, allegory and metaphor have assumed a new importance in Post Modernist art. Semioticians have made us acutely aware of the context and coding of visual communication revealing levels of interpretation and meaning not previously identified. In addition, the emphasis on appropriation in Post Modernism has allowed us to reassess the use of symbols in traditional art. For example, Medieval religious art utilised complex symbolism which could be easily read by those people versed in that visual language. This could give the work of art a literary function; to quote Pope Gregory the Great in the sixth century: "Painting can do for the illiterate what writing does for those who can read." (Gombrich, p95)

Symbols may operate on any or all of the three levels. They may remain meaningful only to the individual through personal associations, they may operate culturally as do Christian symbols; and according to Carl Jung certain archetypal symbols are universal across all humanity.

In my painting I did not set out to deliberately use certain symbols. Rather I found that certain shapes reappeared in the paintings unconsciously and only then did I consciously realise their significance and meaning. The main symbol has been the black shape in many of the paintings which signifies myself, or the conscious self of any person. In some paintings the black figure has become white and is usually derived from smoke becoming solid. Smoke and fire make references to religion and ritual. Other images refer to

war (aeroplane engines, helmets) to the hero archetype (horse heads, shields), the human spirit (birds), urban civilisation and modernism (blocks and tower shapes), sexuality (phallus shapes), religion (the cross) and the unconscious (water, the well image.)

I will describe the use of expressive and formal concerns in the "Notes on Process" later.

The Landscape

Even when relying largely on inner imagination, it is crucial that this inner vision is in turn linked to external events and perceptions. This link between inner imagination and outer external reality has been provided for me by the landscape.

In these paintings I have not been concerned whether the landscape is uniquely Australian or to enter the debate that current romanticism in Australia has Europeanised the landscape. The Australian landscape has always been for me the main source from which my art is derived. Most of my drawing is directly from landscape or is abstracted from landscape. I am interested in the depiction of great distance and depth in the picture plane, often contrasted with close objects. Tree trunks, logs, discarded objects often provide sources for the shapes in my paintings. In October I travelled to Darwin and Kakadu National Park where I did a lot of sketches from the landscape. These images informed my depiction of the landscape in the later work of the year.

Often my landscapes are not of a particular place, but straight from imagination. Clearly, this is to indicate we are placed in the inner world of personal experience which exists regardless of specific time and place. In virtually every culture throughout history spiritual development has frequently been depicted as a journey through a landscape. Landscape provides the backdrop against and in which the "pilgrim" confronts psychic forces represented by

dragons, giants, nymphs etc. Thus we have the Epic; the Odyssey, the travels of Sinbad, the Pilgrim's Progress, the Ramayana and so on. Thus in my work I have used the landscape as a context for the drama which is the theme of each painting.

In terms of painting the Australian landscape I have been most strongly influenced by Fred Williams, Arthur Boyd, David Rankin and Bob Boynes, who all treat landscape in a strong painterly manner. The Fred Williams Retrospective on view late in the year provided a useful resource.

Early Renaissance Religious Art

At the beginning of the year I was instinctively drawn back to early Renaissance religious painting as a point of departure for my own work. I felt the need to place my understanding of contemporary painting in a historical context; to explore its origins in my own work. In addition my exploration of the inner world led me to try to come to terms with my personal and cultural conditioning about "the hero" which I realised had strongly influenced my conceptions of "the artist"; that is the artist as bohemian anti-hero. Early origins of the romantic hero in European culture can be found in the late middle ages and early Renaissance. Finally, I felt that religious painting has been one of the few attempts to represent the inner psyche of human beings. For me, the most moving religious painting occurred in the early Renaissance.

One of the most pervasive and influential male archetypes in our culture is that of the romantic hero who dares everything, overcomes "incredible odds", rescues damsels in distress, is morally incorruptible etc. America drew on this archetype at a time of low national

morale and created Superman, who is about to have his fiftieth birthday and clearly has not aged a day. My own childhood was strongly influenced by stories of King Arthur, Robin Hood, Beowulf and Ulysses.

Later when initially attracted to painting my models were avant garde and bohemian anti heroes; Van Gogh, Modigliani, Soutine. This bohemian anti hero painter is still a very pervasive model for artists as Tom Wolfe describes regarding Pollock and other painters of the New York school. (The Painted Word, 1980 edition.)

Robert Johnson in his book The Psychology of Romantic Love, 1983, goes a long way towards exposing the origins and impact of hero myths on our culture and unconscious. It is a tradition with roots buried deep in European history and which flowered in the late middle ages.

In these paintings I have described a number of my own attitudes towards and perceptions of the hero archetype. It is the hero (the pilgrim, the artist) who undergoes adventures within the landscape; for example in "The Tryst", "Caught", "Plane Over Plain", and "Hero In Full Flight". In some of these paintings the hero is gently ludicrous or cowardly, in others he is struggling and trapped. A darker side of the hero legend, the hero as warmonger is described in "Horse Head and Helmet" and "On The Edge". The hero as religious pilgrim is the theme of "Emergence".

The inner world of human consciousness has often been left to the domain of religion. This, as Carl Jung recognised, is largely because religious statements "refer without exception to things which cannot be established as physical facts. If they did not do this they would inevitably fall into the category of the natural sciences." (Campbell, ed., The Portable Jung, 1971, p 522.) Further Jung is able to interpret religious statements as psychological (internal, subjective) truths rather than external truths. (For example, Answer To Job, 1954, in Campbell.) This

enabled me to look at religious painting as representing the inner psychic structure of human beings and provided a rich source for my work. Comments about religion occur in a number of paintings; "After Moses Left", "Prayer Flag", "Emergence" and "Witnesses."

A key feature of Post Modernist art has been referring to and quoting from art of the past. It has been stated that this is already cultural bankruptcy; that we are going backwards because there is nowhere else to go, or that it is simply a cynical appropriation of past achievements. I took the opportunity this year to clarify my artistic concerns and direction by exploring the cultural and historical antecedents of contemporary art and society.

Tom Wolfe (The Painted Word) described as "reduction" the Modernist rejection of each of the basic tenets of western painting established in the Renaissance: "...Lets see, we just got rid of the little rows of hung pictures... and we've gotten rid of illusion, representational objects, the third dimension, pigment (or most of it), brushstrokes, and now frames and canvas - but what about the wall itself?..." (p100).

In these paintings I have deliberately utilised key aspects of Renaissance painting which remained almost formulas in western painting until Modernism: the action set in a landscape "backdrop", illusionary space and depth, a dialogue between the figures occupying the foreground as well as triangular or symmetrical compositions, chiaroscuro, and colour schemes based around warm browns.

In particular I drew from the work of Bosch, Grunewald and Durer. Durer's etching "The Knight, Death and the Devil" summarises for me all these concerns and themes; human existence is portrayed as a drama in a landscape, with the hero, the knight on a mission, occupying centre stage, confronting aspects of his own individual

cultural and collective unconscious, represented by the devil and death. Other excellent examples are Grunewald's "St Anthony Abbot Assailed by Monstrous Demons" in which the demons can be interpreted as St Anthony's own unconscious forces, and Bosch's "Musical Hell".

I see many of these religious paintings as representations of an entire cosmology. At the top is heaven, in the sky, perhaps dominated by God as supreme ruler and judge. In the middle, the earth, the realm of human experience, while below is hell, the underworld, the unconscious populated by devils, demons and psychic forces. A further theme is the struggle between "good" and "evil"; man has free will to choose; "up" to heaven or "down" to hell. This contrast became reflected in tonal values; for example Bosch represents heaven as a garden of "delights" in light tones and colour, while hell is dark, gloomy and dramatic.

This duality between light and dark tones is a very important aspect of my paintings. In the earlier paintings dark tones dominated, later in the year this reversed and light tones predominated. Later again the dark tones reassumed importance.

<u>Thicker</u>	*	<u>Standard</u>	*	<u>Thinner</u>
Pure paint		Paint with		Washes with
Paint with beeswax		Medium 2		gum turps
medium				Glares with
				Medium 2

All of these methods and mixes were combined freely so that I achieved a wide variety of paint surfaces from very thick to very thin, and with the choices of wet into wet, wet on dry, dry on dry and dry on wet.

I also tried to identify my own moods when painting and relate these particular stages of the work so that, working on several paintings at once, there was usually one at a stage appropriate to my mood.

NOTES ON PROCESS

It was my aim to develop a more complete and coherent approach both to my own painting and to art as a whole. I kept in mind key factors during work on each painting; composition, tone, colour, scale (size and shape) and painterly surface.

Scale was kept standardised with one or two exceptions. Tonal contrasts became most important. Line became completely subjugated to tonal edges. I used two traditional elements; light figure on dark ground and dark on light and studied the use of these in many paintings. I kept the tonal "scales" very simple with perhaps two or three greys between black and white.

I paid particular attention to the surface quality of each painting. I was interested in the painting as a traditional "craft" object.

I utilised three basic means for getting paint onto the canvas; brush, palette knife and fingers, and developed a feel for each approach. This combined with three basic paint mixes:

<u>Thicker</u>	<u>Standard</u>	<u>Thinner</u>
Pure paint	Paint with	Washes with
Paint with beeswax	Medium 2	gum turps
medium		Glazes with
		Medium 2

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and "Emergence" from a Visitation painting by Fra Angelico.

The painting process fell into four distinct stages:

1. Preparation After priming I often began with acrylic washes with no idea of the subject but allowing shapes and forms to emerge. This stage ended with arrival at a basic composition. Other times a preplanned composition was drawn at the start.
2. "Attack" In this stage I suspend all deliberation and paint rapidly using the whole range of mediums and applications. It is a very emotionally charged part of my painting process.
3. Ordering Stepping back, calming down, now making deliberate assessments. Sometimes I sketched possible options. Sometimes major changes were made to composition or treatment which led into further "Attack" phases.
4. Integration The stage of final decisions, highlights, details, and critique. Often I found this the most difficult stage as I raised my self criticism and discrimination. In Cezannes's phrase, is the painting "realised"? - Does it say what I want it to? Do all the parts work towards the whole?

In the past my habit has been to leave each painting at a certain level of satisfaction and move on to a new one. Now I pushed each painting further. Sometimes late in the year paintings done much earlier were still changing. I found this a difficult but rewarding challenge.

Most of my ideas originally came from small biro sketches of which I did many throughout the year. Then I might choose one and work it through to a possible painting. Occasionally I did larger charcoal studies but I find my painting becomes very constricted if it is too predetermined. I also worked from pencil sketches and photographs of the landscape done during the year. Some of the compositions were appropriated directly from other paintings. "Bat In A Cave" came from an etching by Durer, "Witnesses" from a crucifixion by Bosch and "Emergence" from a Visitation painting by Fra Angelico.

CONCLUSION

Since my art training and painting experience has been in discrete segments spread over fifteen years, the post graduate year was an opportunity to consolidate my artistic concerns and understanding and to set myself a number of challenges both conceptually and formally in areas which I felt needed resolving in my painting. I feel that this has been largely successful. I have been able to use painting both as a means of self expression and a tool for exploration and growth.

My theme has been the inner world of human experience which I feel has been largely neglected in western culture and art with its emphasis on the external and objective. I have tried to comment, through the paintings, on aspects of the inner world pertinent to our culture and to all people; the notion of an inner journey, the structure of the human psyche, the role of religion and ritual in society, and the influence of collective archetypes such as the hero on our culture and art.

I have drawn from some of our artistic and cultural origins in the late middle ages and the Renaissance, deliberately utilising many traditional conventions of painting established at that time. This was part of my own quest for an historical understanding of contemporary art.

In all I completed about 25 paintings as well as many small oil studies, various experiments with carved wooden pieces and several large pastel drawings. In this sense it was a productive year, made more so by being able to push my paintings a lot further and discard the less successful.

The last painting done over December and January was a large triptych in which I brought together all the primary images from the year relating them to my impressions of the mystery and indigenous ritual and art of the escarpment area of Kakadu National Park. As a synthesis of my year's concerns and the dual culture we live in in contemporary Australia, I felt this to be an important work for me in my painting to date.

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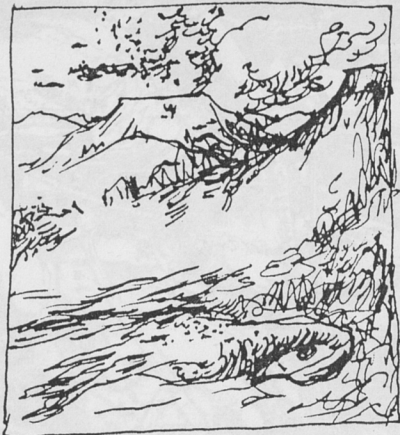
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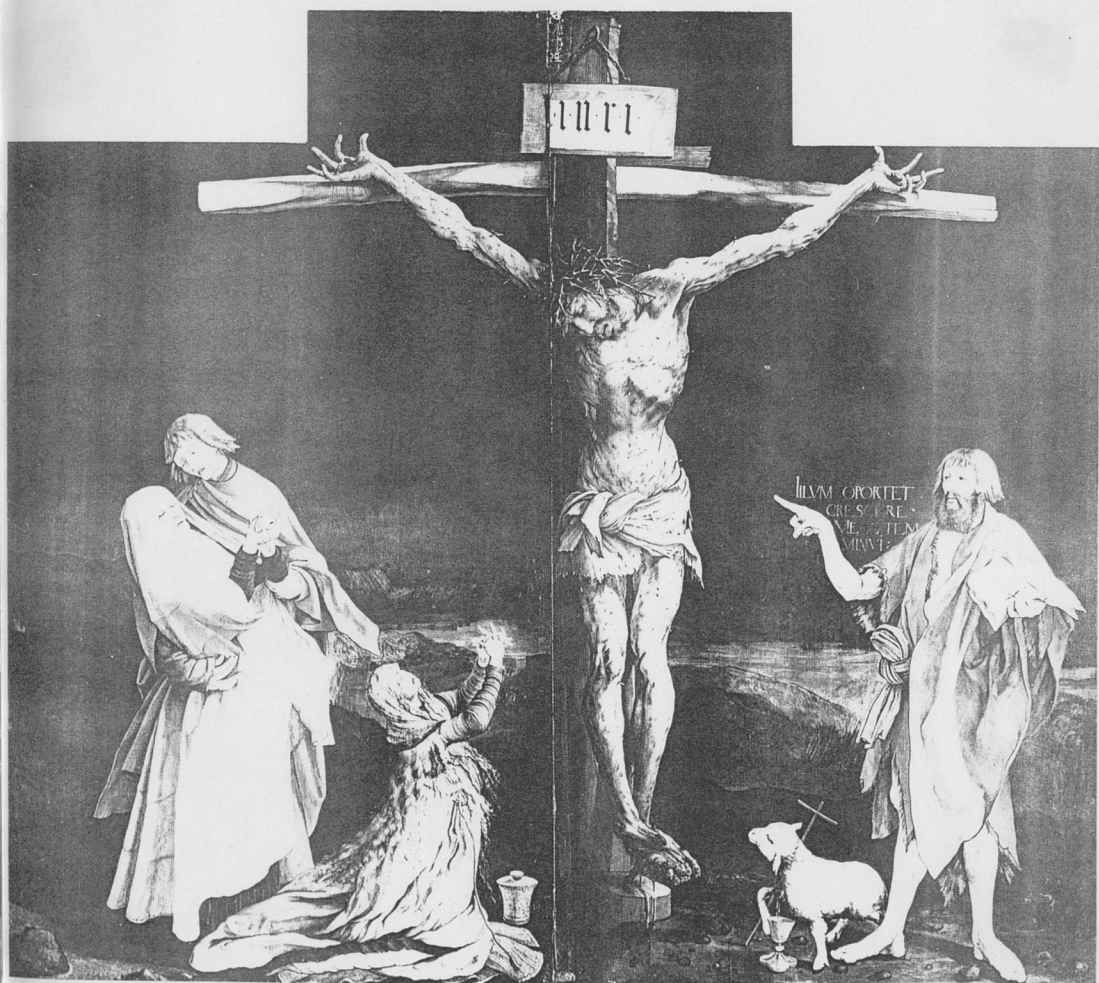


A PAGE FROM THE SKETCHBOOK: GENERATING IDEAS FOR PAINTINGS. Sept 87



70. Le Chevalier, la Mort et le Diable, 1513.

Durer: Engraving



Grunewald: "Christ on the Cross"

The Isenheim Altarpiece
(central panel) 1512 - 1516



27. *St. Anthony Abbot assailed by monstrous demons*
(Wing of the Isenheim Altarpiece). Colmar, Unterlinden Museum



Bosch: Musical Hell (detail). Right hand panel from
The Triptych of the Garden of Delights 1503



Jecius Mus Relating His Dream, the first painting in Rubens' great cycle, strongly recalls Mantegna's *Triumph of Caesar* in its ordering of figures and its forest of lances, banners and emblems.

Rubens was another artist studied during the year. This painting is an excellent example of dark figure on light background and light figure on dark background combined in one painting.



" THE TRYST "

" BAT IN A CAVE "





"CAUGHT"



"HERO IN FULL FLIGHT"

"LOST"



"FAREWELL FROM
A DISTANCE"



"HORSE HEAD
AND HELMET"



"PLANE OVER PLAIN"



"BIRD AND CROSS"

"ON THE EDGE"



"AFTER MOSES LEFT"



"PRAYER FLAGS"





" INSTANCE "



" AT THE COAST "

"EMERGENCE"



"WITNESSES"



"NOURLANGIE TRIPTYCH"

Nourlangie Rock is part of the Arnhemland Escarpment in Kakadu National Park.